

REPORT

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OF THE

ACTING SUPERINTENDENT

OF THE

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

TO THE

SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

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REPORT
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ACTING SUPERINTENDENT OF THE YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK.

CAMP A. E. WOOD,
Near Wawona, Cal., August 28, 1894.

SIR: I have the honor to report as follows on the management of the Yosemite National Park for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1894:

The unfortunate death last April of Capt. A. E. Wood, Fourth Cavalry, my predecessor as acting superintendent of the park, deprived the Army of a gallant and valuable officer and threw the management of the park into inexperienced hands. With one exception, not an officer or man of my command had ever been within the boundaries, and in consequence the early days of my stay here had to be consumed in a reconnaissance of the ground and endeavors to familiarize the members of the command with the roads and trails to be followed.

The command reached Wawona on May 25, and immediately after the receipt of rations I began sending out detachments for the above purpose.

Capt. Wood's methods appeared so rational and effective that I have, as far as practicable, endeavored to follow them out in every particular.

Up to June 30 no depredations of any consequence had been committed. The highlands were still covered with snow, rendering their occupancy by sheep impracticable, and with the exception of one band in the northwestern portion of the park on patented land, I failed to learn of the presence of any. The cattle-owners in the western portion of the park drove their herds in early and, as noticed in previous reports, were not over particular about placing them within inclosures or keeping them on their own land. A large number of loose animals were driven out by my patrols. In this connection it is well to note that the homesteads occupied by a large portion of these people are surrounded very generally by land not the property of the Government, but taken up by private parties, most frequently under the timber laws. This land is undoubtedly private property and I have grave doubts as to the authority for troops to interfere with any stock which may be found at large therein. The owners have generally acquired this land merely for speculative purposes and are known only by name, the majority of them having been in the park solely for the purpose of location, and paying little or no further attention to the land. These lands have no marked boundaries and it is impracticable for a patrol to locate their corners in the short time it has at its disposal.

These circumstances make it most embarrassing for detachments as, although stock may be found outside of the owner's land, it is frequently highly probable that it is not on that of the Government.

The only way that this embarrassment can be avoided is to require that all patented land within the park limits shall be fenced, or else for

the Government to acquire as soon as possible all land not under fence. The first proposition is impracticable. The latter would leave nothing within the park boundaries without a custodian, or at least signs of improvements which would be useful as a guide to troops.

It is respectfully recommended that all land within the limits of the park, taken up and patented under the timber laws, be repurchased by the Government at a fair valuation and that homestead owners be required to fence their lands and keep their fences in repair.

The price paid for timber land should not exceed the original cost, with legal interest on the investment, increased by the taxes paid on the land since its acquisition. In cases where timber has been cut from the land this price should be diminished in each case by the estimated value of such timber when standing. I think that a majority of owners of timber land within the park limits would be more than willing to part with their property under such terms, as it is evidently at present a very poor investment. Conversation with representative men in the vicinity confirms me in these views.

The patented land within the park boundaries, taken up under the homestead laws, presents a different aspect. Some of it is occupied only during the summer months, the only use of the land being for grazing purposes. The stock have to be withdrawn in the fall, as the country affords them no winter feed, and it is more economical to winter them in the lower altitudes, where they require less forage.

Land of this class should be condemned as grazing land only, as its value is not that of land where stock can be subsisted the year round.

Another class of homestead property is that continuously occupied. This land contains more improvements than the other and some of it has been occupied continuously for over twenty years. It would be a hardship to the holders of land of this character to acquire their land under the same conditions as the other.

There are a number of cases of this class, where it would be a benefit to the Government for the land to remain in private hands, as thereby facilities are given to tourists and camping parties which they could not otherwise obtain, but in the large majority of cases it is undoubtedly wisest to acquire the lands as soon as possible. It is suggested in the acquisition of homestead lands that a board of appraisal be appointed to fix the value of each parcel, and that with the exceptions above noted they be purchased by the Government.

As stated in previous reports, this can never be done so cheaply as at present, and as it is good public policy to preserve the timber in these forests and keep the forests themselves in a state as near that of nature as possible, for the benefit of those who come after us, it is evident that there should be no divided ownership in the land. The use of these lands for grazing purposes is productive of a great deal of evil. Cattle and horses do comparatively little damage. The chief objection to their presence is that the home ranch is almost invariably on the public road, and, particularly in the case of a cattle ranch, this is unsightly and highly offensive to the ordinary traveler.

The presence of sheep within the park limits is a serious menace, and should be positively forbidden under all circumstances. Reasons for this statement have been often repeated. Under present circumstances these matters can not be regulated, and it will not be possible to so regulate them so long as private ownership of land within the park limits is permitted.

I can not too strongly recommend the passage of laws for the government of the park, containing provisions for their enforcement and pro-

viding distinct penalties for their violation. The rules, as promulgated, are virtually a dead letter. It is well known that they can be enforced only by the ejection of the offender, and many prefer to take their chances of detection and ejection to complying with the regulations.

Capt. Wood, in his last report, made recommendations on this matter, which, I respectfully urge, should be carried out at as early a date as practicable. It is understood that such laws are in force in the Yellowstone Park, and that they are productive of great good in the management of the same.

The game in the park limits is on the increase, and with proper protection this will form a game preserve finer than any in the Sierras. The park is situated in various counties, each having its own game laws, and it is presumed that, under the State and county ordinances, prosecution may lie in the courts for their infringement. In the open season, however, there is, as above stated in the case of other trespass, no punishment but that of ejection.

Quail are decidedly on the increase, grouse may be heard drumming in the woods, and signs of deer are frequent. Bears, panthers, and coyotes are not rare in certain portions of the park and are quite useful coadjutors in maneuvering against the trespassing sheep herder. They are in some cases very bold, a pair of panthers having their den within a very short distance from my camp and making their presence known in various ways.

In some of the streams trout are very plentiful, and large numbers have been transplanted in the past. This has been done with the aid of the fish commissioners of the State of California, who have desired my cooperation in the matter and have been promised whatever assistance I can lend them.

From conversation with the old-timers here it would seem that no fish were indigenous to these streams, but that they have all been imported. If such is the case pleasing results may be anticipated from the work now going on, as some of the streams are teeming with fish. It is a satisfaction also to know that ordinarily it takes a skillful angler to catch a string of fish in these streams, and that consequently there is no probability of their being depleted.

There have been no forest fires of any magnitude within the park during the fiscal year. Examination of this subject leads me to believe that the absolute prevention of fires in these mountains will eventually lead to disastrous results. There is a continual dropping from the coniferous trees, which, in the course of a year, forms a carpet of inconsiderable thickness. This burns easily, with little heat, and does practically little damage. This fire also destroys, or partially destroys, the fallen timber which it touches, and leaves the ground clean and ready for the next year's growth. It is believed that enough young trees will escape annual fires to replace the others as they reach old age and fall, and it is not thought that the slight heat of the annual fires will appreciably affect the growth or life of well-grown trees.

On the other hand, if the years' droppings are allowed to accumulate they will increase until the resulting heat, when they do burn, will destroy everything before it. The climate of these mountains is not conducive to quick decay, and a ten years' accumulation of dead vegetation represents a vast amount of kindling and solid fuel, which will, when ignited, convert the forest into a roaring furnace. It is not to be doubted that some time, in spite of all precautions and years of immunity, extensive fires will be kindled, and if we have spent the preceding years in accumulating fuel we must expect disastrous results. This is

the view of the matter held by the sheepmen, who are responsible for a large percentage of forest fires, but they include in their programme the previous destruction of every living thing in the forest within reach of a sheep's teeth. I will, however, do them the justice to say that they do not kindle all the fires, and that, on the whole, it is a marvel that forest fires are so infrequent. It is a well-known fact that the Indians burned the forests annually.

My predecessor has twice recommended a reduction of the area of this park, thereby throwing out a large proportion of the mining and agricultural land now within its boundaries, and also adopting natural lines instead of the artificial ones which now obtain. This seems very desirable. A large extent of territory is now included in the reserve which is of practically no value to the sight-seer, nor does it appear to be useful as a conservator of the water supply. These remarks refer principally to the tract north of the Tuolumne River. There are also sections which are valuable as agricultural and mineral lands, which are virtually useless for park purposes—notably in the southeast and southwest corners.

The reduction recommended in the annual report of the acting superintendent for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1892, appears in the main to be excellent, and were it carried out the cost to the Government of reassuming title to the lands included in the new boundaries would be greatly diminished. These boundaries, except in the west, are along natural lines, and the constant excuse now offered by trespassers could not obtain, and the ease of policing would render the service far more effective.

The location of a western boundary is not a perfectly easy matter, inasmuch as it can not be done on natural lines. It is desirable that this shall be a straight line and as short as possible. Circumstances here also place it as far to the east as may be, in order to obviate the necessity of the purchase of too much patented land in the west end of the present park. I would, therefore, recommend the western boundary be the township line between townships 19 and 20, extending from the South Fork of the Merced, north to the Tuolumne. There is an offset in this line between township 1 south and township 2 south due to a failure of the township lines to register, an apparent fault in the survey. This need not be considered, but the boundary may be run on either line at pleasure. This line should be carefully run, and permanently marked by felling of trees and blazing, and an appropriation should be made for the purpose as early as possible.

The suggested reduction of the park limits would throw open to the public about twenty-one townships, rejecting most of the land now under private ownership, and, by the expenditure of a comparatively small amount, would place the entire ownership of the park in the hands of the Government.

This, with the passage of proper laws for the enforcement of the park regulations, would place the management of the park on a substantial footing, and relieve the acting superintendent from the embarrassment he at present suffers in the police of the park.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

G. H. G. GALE,

Captain Fourth Cavalry,

Acting Superintendent Yosemite National Park.

THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

